

**SUNK LAKE STATE NATURAL AREA**  
**CLASS II NATURAL SCIENTIFIC STATE NATURAL AREA**

**COUNTY:** Lauderdale

**7.5' QUADRANGLE:** Fort Pillow

**PHYSIOGRAPHIC PROVINCE:** Mississippi  
Alluvial Floodplain

**ACREAGE:** 1,870

**OWNERSHIP:** State of Tennessee

**YEAR DESIGNATED:** 1986

**DESCRIPTION:** Sunk Lake is a 1,870-acre natural area located in Lauderdale County about 18.5 miles northwest of Covington. It is located in the Mississippi Alluvial Plain and included in the Eastern Gulf Coastal Region of the southeastern United States. Sunk Lake supports excellent examples of bald cypress swamp, bottomland hardwood forest, and emergent marsh aquatic habitat. The diversity of wetland and upland communities offer a wide range of habitat for waterfowl and other birds, fish, reptiles, amphibians. Rare plant species at Sunk Lake include creeping spot-flower (*Acmella oppositifolia*), featherfoil (*Hottonia inflata*), lake cress (*Neobeckia aquatica*), ovate-leaved arrowhead (*Sagittaria platyphylla*) and cedar elm (*Ulmus crassifolia*).

The forests at Sunk Lake surround a series of six shallow depressional lakes within the floodplain of the Mississippi River. The Five Hundred Pound Lake name derives from a local fisherman's account of having caught 500 pounds of buffalo fish there in one day. The lakes within the preserve were created by the same series of the New Madrid earthquake that created Reelfoot Lake. Floodwaters from the Mississippi River recharge the lakes approximately every five years. Recent additions to the natural area that included farmland have been planted with cherrybark oak, nuttall oak, willow oak, and other bottomland species to restore the bottomland hardwood forest, once the dominant ecosystem of the Mississippi Alluvial Floodplain. Forest restoration will help reduce lake siltation, which is a primary threat to their longevity.

Sunk lake is cooperatively managed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Tennessee Natural Areas Program. It is classified by the Fish and Wildlife Service as a Public Use Natural Area and a Wildlife Refuge. Public access rules differ for the northern and southern units. The southern unit is only open to the public from March 16 – November 14 because of its refuge status. A 180-foot boardwalk provides an observation viewing area of one lake. A boat ramp provides lake access for fishing boats and canoes. Gasoline powered boats are prohibited. The northern unit is open year-round.

**SITE MANAGEMENT:** U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Lower Hatchie National Wildlife Refuge, 234 Fort Prudhomme Dr., Henning, TN 38041, phone (731) 738-2296. Division of Natural Areas, Jackson Environmental Field Office, 1625 Hollywood Drive, Jackson TN 38305, phone (731) 512-1369. Division of Natural Areas, 7<sup>th</sup> Floor L&C Annex, 401 Church St., Nashville, TN 37243, phone (615) 532-0431.

**PUBLIC ACCESS:** The southern unit of Sunk Lake is open to the public from March 16 – November 14. Parking, a boat ramp, and a boardwalk are provided. The northern unit is open year-round. Please refer to refuge brochure for more information.

**DIRECTIONS:** From Covington, take U.S. Hwy. 51 north to Henning. Turn west on Hwy. 87 and continue to Sunk Lake Road. Turn right on Sunk Lake Rd. at the Three Points Community and travel for 2.9 miles to a gravel road on the right; follow the graveled road to the parking area.